

MSI 23 July 2020

VI. Habits of thought and of body [Bottom of p. 46 and first para p. 47]

Alexander uses the term “patient” from his association with his doctor friends Steward McKay and Robert Scanes Spicer. Watch out for when he starts writing “pupil”.

Assuming the correct mental attitude must precede the performance of any act. It’s not what you do, it’s the way that you do it that’s important. Fixed ideas are a barrier to change.

[Cut to p. 53, ‘Fortunately for us . . .]

I think the following pages contain some of the most important passages and lucid descriptions of the Technique in Alexander’s writings, e.g.:

- Principles of mechanical advantage with an understanding of the inhibitory and volitional power of the objective mind, by which these deterrent habits can be raised to conscious control.
- There are two kinds of habit: the difference between a habit that is recognised and understood and the habit that is not. In other words, subconscious (“instinctive”) fixed habits and those adaptable habits that can be altered at will. ‘It will be understood that the word “habit” as generally understood does not apply to the new discipline.’

I particularly like the quirky quote by one of Alexander’s early pupils, the Rev. W. G. Pennyman, vicar of St Mary’s, Shrewsbury:

*One great feature of Mr Alexander’s system as seen in practical use is that the individual loses every suggestion of strain. He becomes perfectly “lissom” in body; all strains and tensions disappear, and his body works like an oiled machine. Moreover his system has a reflex result upon the mind . . . It creates the new bottles, and then the new wine [buoyancy, freedom and gaiety of spirit] can be poured in, freely and fully.*

Alexander outlines his argument, that mankind must recognize that “he suffers from mental delusions regarding his physical acts and that his sensory appreciation, or kinaesthesia is defective and misleading; in other words, he realizes that his sense register of the amount of muscular tension needed to accomplish even a simple act of everyday life is faulty and harmful, and his mental conception of such conditions as relaxation and concentration impossible in practical application.

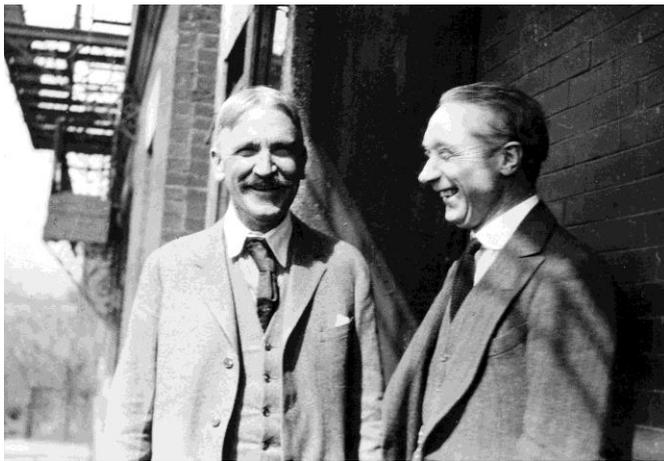
For there can be no doubt that man on the subconscious plane now relies too much on a debauched [distorted, corrupted?] sense of feeling or of sense-appreciation for the guidance of his psycho-physical mechanism, and that he is gradually becoming more and more overbalanced emotionally with very harmful and far-reaching results.

General discussion about the teacher “giving the pupil the correct experience”. In lessons, the teacher can (with her pupil’s full cooperation) make readjustments so that sensory appreciation is more reliable. This is similar to a mechanical measuring instrument being re-adjusted so that its “readings” are calibrated to give accurate data on which to base one’s

judgement. In another place, Alexander uses the example of the folly of a ship's captain who sets his course using a compass that is incorrectly calibrated and gives false readings.

Hence, a 'sense register of muscular tension'. The readjustment can ideally be brought about on one's own by applying inhibition and direction. But, because of the way we are educated to think, very few of us can appreciate non-doing and allowing the right thing to happen. Instead, we believe that when something is wrong we have to do something to put it right. If that doesn't fix it then we are not trying hard enough. Later, Alexander explains that his technique is concerned with *restoring* conditions of use and not adding or doing more.

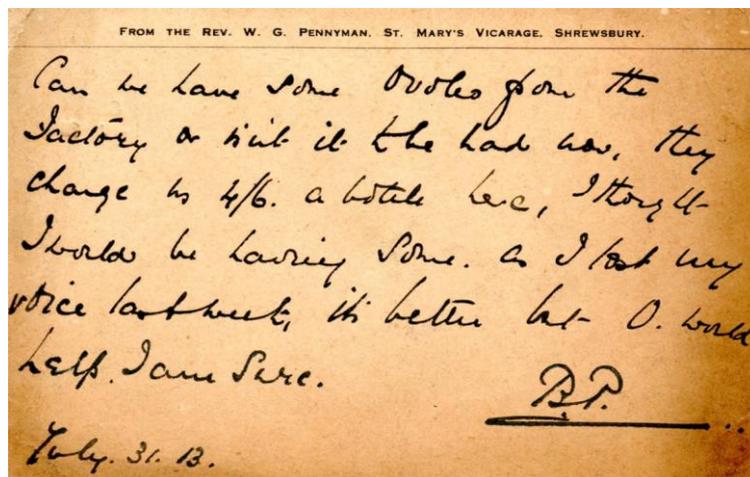
There are changes to freedom in thinking as well as freedom in movement:



"Intellectually, Dewey said, he found it much easier, after he had studied the technique, to hold a philosophical position calmly once he had taken it or to change it if new evidence came up warranting a change. He contrasted this own attitude with the rigidity of other academic thinkers who adopt a position early in their careers and then use their intellects to defend it indefinitely." (Frank Pierce Jones, *Freedom to Change*, p. 97)

John Dewey, facing the camera, with Alexander. New York, 1917?.

Postcard (1913) from Rev. Pennyman requesting a bottle of *Ovoleo*, an emulsion of cod-liver oil and egg yolks, manufactured and sold by Alexander for a short time before WW1.



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